Meeting began: 12:58 p.m.
Meeting ended: 2:30 p.m.

6a

~~TOP SECRET~~

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S
TUESDAY NATIONAL SECURITY LUNCH

January 23, 1968
In the Mansion

Secretary McNamara told Clark Clifford that "this is what it is like on a typical day. We had an inadvertent intrusion into Cambodia. We lost a B-52 with four H-bombs aboard. We had an intelligence ship captured by the North Koreans."

Clark Clifford asked, "May I leave now?"

The President asked if there had been any reaction from the Soviets on the ship incident. Rostow said a message was coming up now.

Secretary Rusk said the Soviets had advised the U.S. Government that they had nothing to do with the incident and that the U.S. government should talk with North Korea.

Secretary Rusk said the problem of rescuing the ship and its crew is considerably different from retaliation resulting from an attack.

The President asked what are the alternatives. The President said he was sure they included:

1. Hitting the North Koreans with U.S. forces.
2. Getting a thorough explanation
3. Capturing one of their ships

The President said he was anxious to know exactly what happened.

Secretary McNamara said he had no explanation other than the information that the ship was in international waters, more than fifteen miles out.

Secretary Rusk said that his department is studying the Armistice Agreement on the definition of international waters. He said there is a close relation to waters "contiguous" to North Korea, but the armistice does not define new international boundaries for the high seas. Where the ship was before the incident is unknown.

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6
NLJ 92-142
By cb, NARA Date 9-10-99

~~TOP SECRET~~

General Wheeler said this was not necessarily the case. Using a map, General Wheeler pointed to the position of the ship at 9:25 the night before and at 12 noon it was 25 miles off shore and 16 miles away from the nearest land associated with North Korea.

Secretary McNamara said it was unclear whether or not the ship had strayed into waters near the coast of North Korea prior to the incident.

Secretary Rusk said the North Koreans put out a very bitter statement charging the U. S. Government with spying and aggression. General Wheeler said the North Koreans charged us with engaging in acts of aggression.

Secretary McNamara said the alternatives included picking up units of the North Korean fleet or units of the North Korean army along the DMZ or re-enforcing U. S. troops in South Korea. He said we could fly U. S. aircraft from the states to re-enforce units currently stationed there.

Secretary McNamara said if this incident indicates any new threat on South Korea, this would be desirable because North Korean air power is stronger than South Korean air power. The opposite is true of ground forces. Another alternative is to send additional naval forces.

CIA Director Helms said this incident is one in a series of increased harassment. He cited the recent plot against Blue House and many violations along the demilitarized zone.

The President asked for an explanation of the B-52 crash.

General Wheeler said a fire erupted in the navigational compartment of the aircraft and the plane plummeted to the ice about 7 1/2 miles short of the runway in Thule, Greenland. All but one of the crew was recovered. Technical and disaster teams have been sent to the area in an effort to locate the nuclear device.

Secretary McNamara said that there is approximately 250 to 400 feet of water below the ice. A special group has been sent to coordinate the search. Secretary McNamara said the decision was made that no more live bombs will be carried aloft at any time. Secretary McNamara said that General Wheeler and he had agreed to this yesterday. The only time they had been carried live was during air alerts. General Wheeler said there is no need for this and the practice will be discontinued.

Returning to the ship incident off North Korea, Secretary McNamara said there was a period beginning about 10 p.m. in which DoD is not aware of exactly what happened aboard the ship. Secretary Rusk said the commander of the ship did not ask for air cover or help or did not try to get out of the area quickly.

General Wheeler said at 12 o'clock Korean time (noon) the ship encountered a North Korean patrol boat. The Pueblo indicated it was a hydrographic ship when approached. At 13:45 hours the message came back that the ship was being boarded. General Wheeler said the machine gun aboard the ship was notuncovered. The General showed the President a photograph of the ship.

Director Helms said he advised the Senate Foreign Relations Committee this morning of information about the incident.

Secretary Rusk then read from a cable which was brought into the meeting on a session which Ambassador Thompson had with the Soviets in Moscow. The Soviets said this was not their problem. They said the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea is a source of tension. They said they would not take action on the matter.

The President asked what other channels are open to us.

Secretary Rusk said the Mixed Armistice Commission meets at midnight tonight to discuss the attack on Blue House. We will raise the matter of the ship at that time.

The President asked what has been the reaction of the South Koreans?

Secretary Rusk said the Minister of Defense chided us for urging them not to retaliate when they are attacked and yet now finding ourselves caught in this situation.

It is unclear whether our men were wounded by self-destruct devices or by enemy fire.

General Wheeler said the man who lost a leg was engaged in blowing up equipment. He said the use of the term 'wounded' seemed odd unless enemy fire was involved on some of the casualties.

The President said we need to see what our options are in this situation.

Secretary McNamara said he had a couple of people working on this under Paul Nitze.

Secretary Rusk said the North Koreans may want to trade these sailors for infiltrators who have been captured crossing into South Korea.

The President said he thinks that this incident is related to the whole picture. He said he would not be surprised if something happened in Berlin to coincide with what is going on in Vietnam and in Korea.

The President asked if we were confident of our situation around Khesanh.

The President asked General Wheeler if we had given General Westmoreland everything he needed.

General Westmoreland said yes, sir.

General Wheeler said Westmoreland is confident of being able to handle the problem in Khesanh. He said that re-enforcements have been sent into the area and the weather is not continuously bad. Even in the event of bad weather there is sufficient artillery. In addition, the ARVN have sent a Ranger Batallion to the area to make this a joint effort.

The President pointed out that we have had a very good press from Saigon in the last two or three weeks.

Rostow said General Sidle is an excellent man who is moving the ARVN out front in the press. General Wheeler said Sidle has a good program and also is making Westmoreland more prominent in the news.

The President asked if anybody had heard from Senator Ted Kennedy on the refugee study. Walt Rostow said he had not.

Secretary McNamara said he saw a preliminary report from the field. Based on the questions asked, it appears the report will emphasize excessive fire from allied weapons is resulting in civilian casualties and refugees.

Walt Rostow asked should the incident be referred to the United Nations, involving the ship.

The President said this would be protective and would show a lack of malice on our part.

Secretary Rusk said we might like to take this to the Security Council. First, we should see what comes from the Mixed Armistice Commission.

Director Helms said the Soviets have their own ships of this kind including two ships off the Korean coast to keep an eye on the Red Chinese. In addition, they have one ship off Guam.

With reference to the expected enemy offensive near Khesanh, General Wheeler said General Momyer is coordinating all air support.

Secretary McNamara said that the anti-personnel barrier has been defended for use around Khesanh.

General Wheeler said that "gravel" (ammunition used to blow up personnel) will be placed in the area tomorrow.

The President read portions of General Westmoreland's cable outlining developments in the area and the potential terrorism which is expected in Saigon.

There was a discussion about the budget handling of military and economic aid. Secretary McNamara argued that these two items should be separated out in order to avoid the results of last year. At a minimum, Secretary McNamara asked that Korea and credit sales should be separated.

Secretary Rusk said on the basis of past record this proposal would have problems with the authorizing committees. The President asked Secretary McNamara and Secretary Rusk to get together on this.

The President asked Clark Clifford his opinion on the qualifications of Frank McKinney as Ambassador of the Philippines. Clifford said he thought McKinney was a capable man.

Secretary Rusk said he would look at this matter and give the President his recommendation.

Secretary McNamara said that a representative of the Jordanian government is in Washington and wants more than 100 million dollars in equipment.

General Wheeler said he wants 12 squadrons of F-4s, 175 tanks, and anti-aircraft. Senator Symington is strongly against re-arming the Arabs.

Secretary McNamara said we should provide some arms and tanks but Israel will be very upset if we give the 105 millimeter gun.

Secretary McNamara said that King Hussein's position is in danger. The loyalty of his army is in doubt. If we do not provide arms, they might use Russia as a supplier.

Secretary McNamara recommended that we agree to give some tanks and reinstate the deal which was in effect prior to the Middle East crisis in principle.

The President asked Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara to look into the matter further.

# # #